# 'Taking These Diamonds in the Rough and Shining Them Up a Bit':

## The Gift of the Dr. Hal Dellinger Fine Arts Collection

**By Amy Chellino**

There are those people who come into our lives who believe and inspire us to reach achievements that are greater than we thought possible. Coming across boxes in the Archives filled with memorabilia from the beginning of JJC's music department was a treasure. The true gift, however, was researching and learning about the dedication and talent behind the person who collected these memories, Dr. Hal Dellinger. His spirit of generosity and mentorship shined through the concert recordings, newspaper articles, concert programs and correspondence that have become the Dr. Hal Dellinger Fine Arts Collection, which is the most recent digitizing project of the JJC Archives.

During his 28-year career as director of music and education at Joliet Junior College, Dellinger created the foundation for the Fine Arts Department and inspired students to expand their instrumental, voice and performance skills. Under his direction, the framework for creativity, art and performance were established at JJC, and achieving extraordinary goals has been ingrained in JJC's promise ever since.

"I consider Joliet to be one of the greatest centers for the development of musical talent in the nation today... The status of music in this community will reach unbelievable heights," Dellinger wrote in the 1950 Spring Concert Program.

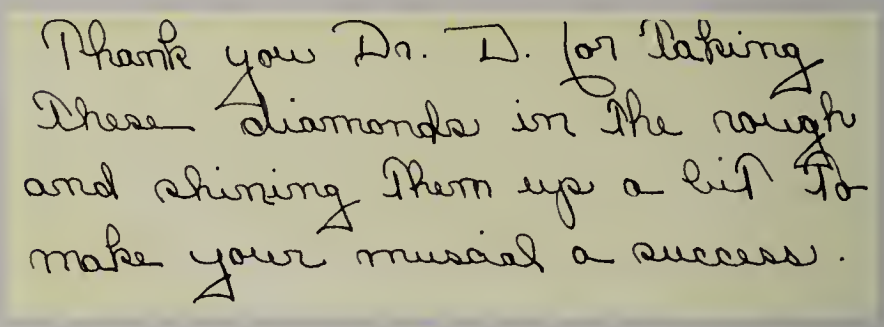
Dellinger began his tenure at the college in 1949 with the goal of establishing a music education program.

"He was an excellent pianist and fun-loving trombone player and played on the road with several dance bands before accepting the position at JJC," Jerry Lewis, professor emeritus and Dellinger's colleague, said.

Dellinger, frequently called "Dr. D" or "Doc," earned his education at Columbia University in New York City. He was the first faculty member at JJC to have a doctorate degree, and he oversaw the swing, concert and jazz bands, orchestra and choir, in addition to teaching and advising students. He conducted these groups in musicals, concerts, programs and assemblies. Performances of Handel's Messiah in December and a spring concert in May were anticipated events each semester, and audiences were treated to a variety of musical performances featuring the work of composers including Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington and Irving Berlin, to name a few.

Dellinger was a committed teacher who believed in and cultivated the talents and potential of his students.

Students expressed in the 1957 yearbook dedication to Dellinger, "[His] outstanding attributes are patience, understanding, and friendliness...he is ready to help in any way at any time." A card from the choir and band expressed, "Thank you Dr. D for taking these diamonds in the rough and shining them up a bit."

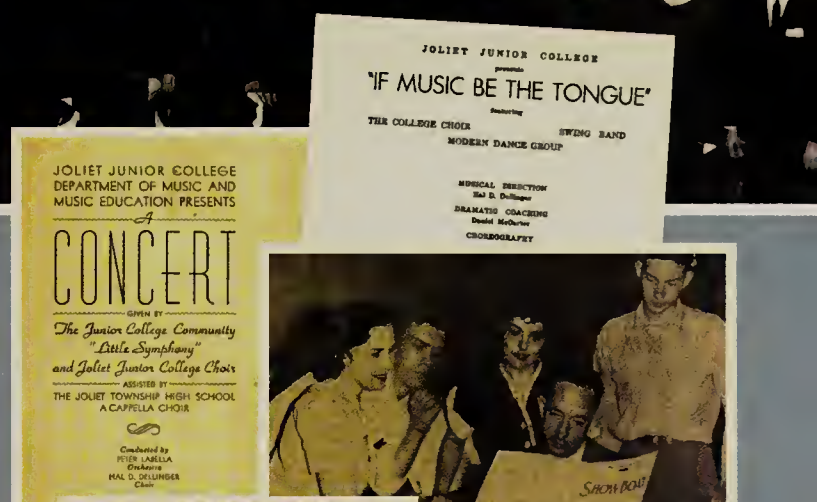

Thank you Dr. D. for taking these diamonds in the rough and shining them up a bit to make your musical a success.

Lewis added that Dellinger and his wife, Nita, had no children of their own, and that "the JJC music students were their children...the music department was his pride and joy."

A former student, Daniel J. McNabb ('56), spent many hours with Dellinger as a member of the choir and piano student. He expressed in a letter the impact Dellinger had on his life.

"I consider him the most influential person that helped me decide on my vocation," McNabb wrote. "He was a wonderful teacher and coach helping me to see the importance of understanding and developing a good taste in music."

McNabb ultimately transferred to the University of Illinois in Champaign and received a master's degree in music education, but never forgot Dellinger's influence.




"I wondered many times, 'How would Dr. Dellinger handle this musical problem?' Dr. D's music was so inspiring to us," McNabb said. "We just wanted to achieve musical success as he did...What more could a teacher aspire to give to his students than that?"

The Dr. Hal Dellinger Fine Arts Collection shares an essential piece of JJC's history and can be viewed at the JJC Library's Archives webpage: **https://library.jjc.edu/collections/archives**. The concert recordings from the 1950s reflect the talent and enthusiasm of the band and choir under Dellinger's direction.

These words from the Spring Swing Concert program from 1957 exemplify the gift of Dellinger's philosophy: "Music's...objective is to give love, life, hope, inspiration and satisfaction to all who come within its reach." Dr. Dellinger instilled these values at JJC and gave his students the ability to achieve exceptional goals. Although I never had the honor of knowing Dr. Dellinger firsthand, this collection is a reminder that each of us can aspire to the highest of goals, especially under the guidance of a kind and generous mentor. View and listen to the Dr. Hal Dellinger Fine Arts Collection and experience the spirit and creativity of a transformative professor and the diamonds he made sparkle.

In the heart of giving to a student with musical aspirations, make a contribution to the Dr. Hal Dellinger Music Scholarship. Visit **https://www.jjc.edu/giving**.

**Looking for a safe, secure place to donate your JJC memorabilia?**

The JJC Library Archives is always looking for ephemera from our college's past. If you have materials you would like to donate, or have any questions about materials in the library archive, please contact:

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